

changed to drug and alcohol abuse, pregnancy, suicide, rape, robbery and assault. In the last 12 months alone the number of children bringing weapons to schools in Idaho is up more than 25 percent. Our problems have changed significantly and so must our solutions.

After the Columbine tragedy, I decided a dialogue must begin on the local level to bring about positive change rather than focusing on Federal legislation. I organized three town hall meetings in my district called Saving Our Schools, or SOS meetings. I invited the student body presidents to participate in a panel about school violence. Each president from the surrounding schools also signed an antiviolence pledge that they took back to their high schools.

Today, it is my pleasure to report that more than 5,000 students from over 40 Idaho high schools in my district took the pledge. The pledge reads: "I pledge to keep my school and community safe by never using violence to solve my disagreements and taking personal responsibility for my actions." Some of those Idaho high schools include Aberdeen High School, Blackfoot High School from which I graduated, Buhl, Burley, Butte, Castleford, Firth, and on and on.

The maturity and perception of the students during the town hall meetings and assemblies impressed me. Idaho holds top-notch students who care about their schools. School violence is not going away, and there is not just one answer. But my hope is that schools and communities will look for answers tailored to their needs to ensure schools are places of learning, not of fear.

I encourage my colleagues to initiate similar dialogues with the students, parents and school officials in the communities of their districts before tragedy strikes, not after. As we begin another school year, I hope my House colleagues will urge the students in their districts to take the pledge against violence in our Nation's schools.

PRESCRIPTION DRUGS

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Ms. STABENOW) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. STABENOW. Mr. Speaker, on April 12, I led an hour of debate of prescription drug coverage for senior citizens. I read three letters from around the state from seniors who shared their personal stories. On the 12th, I made a commitment to continue to read a different letter every week until the House enacts reform. That was six months ago. Although the House passed a prescription drug bill this summer, I believe it will not help most seniors. So, I will continue to read letters until Congress enacts a real Medicare prescription drug benefit. This week, I will read a letter from Harriet Simmons of Detroit, Michigan.

Text of the letter:

Dear Congresswoman STABENOW: I am writing to express my concern over the escalating cost of prescription drugs for seniors. As a senior myself, I must take the medicines prescribed by my doctor to maintain my health. The cost of these drugs can rise from month to month. Sometimes, I have had to purchase half of my medicine or take less so it will last longer.

The Michigan Emergency Pharmaceutical Program for Seniors provides temporary help for 3 months out of the year if you qualify. But, what are we to do the remaining 9 months? Many seniors are too young or just above the income guidelines to qualify. We need help in obtaining our prescriptions for the above cited reasons. I support your efforts to lower the cost of drugs for seniors.

I would like to add: We are senior citizens today but yesterday we were active, tax paying citizens. Don't mistreat us now. We need protection.

Sincerely,

HARRIETT SIMMONS.

Harriet deserves a genuine Medicare prescription drug benefit. Time is running out to do something in this Congress. We must enact real prescription drug reform before we adjourn.

SOCIAL SECURITY SOLVENCY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Michigan (Mr. SMITH) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SMITH of Michigan. Mr. Speaker, this is good news. I think, for people that are concerned with Social Security. Social Security is one of America's most important programs. I think we have missed a great opportunity in the last 8 years not to develop the kind of policy changes in Social Security that will for sure keep it solvent. Now it is part of the great debate, and I think it is important that we all understand a little better how the Social Security program works. Social Security benefits are a guaranteed act; and the fact is, is that there is going not to be enough money coming in from the payroll tax to pay benefits without some changes. The big change is a better return on the investments.

When Franklin Roosevelt created the Social Security program over 6 decades ago, he wanted it to feature a private sector component to build retirement income. Social Security was supposed to be one leg of a three-legged stool to support retirees. It was supposed to go hand in hand with personal savings and private pension plans. Of course, when it passed through the Senate, it is interesting. The Senate on two votes back in 1935 said that it had to be optional investments so individuals could invest their own money. Provisions were put into that law so that certain States and counties would be allowed to have alternative private investment plans, and now we are seeing counties in Texas and around the country that opted out of Social Security getting four or five, six, 10 times as much bene-

fits from their pension retirement plans that they own as opposed to what Social Security would pay.

The biggest risk is doing nothing at all in Social Security. One thing I am concerned about is President Clinton and Vice President GORE have suggested that we simply add huge, giant IOUs to the Social Security trust fund. The problem with that is that the full faith and credit of this country is good, but the way we pay back Treasury notes now is simply to borrow more money. If we are going to borrow \$20 trillion, it is going to tremendously change the economics of this country.

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Social Security has a total unfunded liability of over \$20 trillion. The Social Security trust fund contains nothing but IOUs. That means you have to either borrow the money to pay it back, increase taxes to pay it back, or you have to reduce benefits. We have to have two things very clear: No increase in taxes, and no reduction in benefits for existing or near-term retirees.

To keep paying the promised Social Security benefits, the payroll tax will have to be increased at least 50 percent of total income or benefits will have to be cut by one-third. Neither of those options are good.

In conclusion, this is the demonstrated problem of Social Security. We are in a short range up to for the next 12 to 15 years of a little more money coming in in the Social Security payroll tax than is needed to pay benefits. But then look what happens in the out years. Twenty trillion, in today's dollars, but in those dollars that are going to have to be paid out over and above what is coming in from the Social Security tax 50 or 60 years from now, it is going to be 120 trillion of those inflated future year dollars. Huge problems. It needs to be dealt with now. We have to get a better return on the investment.

The six principles of saving Social Security that I and Senator ROD GRAMS have come up with are: Protect the current and future beneficiaries; allow freedom of choice; preserve the safety net; make Americans better off, not worse off; create a fully funded system; and no increase in taxes.

Right now the average American worker pays more in the payroll FICA tax than in the income tax. Seventy-eight percent of American workers pay more in the FICA tax than they do the income tax. Let us not increase taxes on them again. Let us do something now, so we do not pass this burden on to our kids and grandkids.

RYAN WHITE CARE ACT

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. QUINN). Under a previous order of the House, the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.